

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 8237

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, ICFTU, ILO, AR
SUBJECT: LABOR MINISTER COMMENTS ON INTERNATIONAL LABOR ACTIVITIES
AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS WHILE FURTHER UNIONS INTERVENED

1. SUMMARY. IN LABOR MINISTER'S VIEW, VISITS BY FOREIGN
TRADE UNION LEADERS TO ARGENTINA ARE INCONVENIENT AND
INCONSISTENT WITH CURRENT PERIOD OF SUSPENSION OF UNION
ACTIVITIES. NEVERTHELESS, GOA HAS PERMITTED SUCH VISITS AND
HAS MAINTAINED OPEN DOOR POLICY IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE FOREIGN
CRITICISM. RECENT INTERVENTIONS, TAKEN TOGETHER WITH
MINISTER'S COMMENTS, MAY SIGNAL NEW GOA ATTITUDE TOWARD
INTERNATIONAL LABOR ACTIVITIES OF ARGENTINE UNIONS DURING
CURRENT PERIOD OF SUSPENSION. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING LUNCHEON AT THE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE
DECEMBER 15, LABOR MINISTER (BRIG. GENERAL) LIENDO MADE THE
FOLLOWING COMMENTS OF INTEREST:
A. BEFORE CHRISTMAS THE GOVERNMENT WOULD RELEASE A LARGE
NUMBER OF TRADE UNION LEADERS AND OTHERS CURRENTLY BEING
DETAINED. THESE INDIVIDUALS WOULD BE DEFINITELY RELEASED
(BY WHICH WE UNDERSTOOD HIM TO MEAN THAT THE CHARGES AGAINST
THEM WOULD BE DROPPED AND THEIR CASES CLOSED).
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BUENOS 08237 211157Z

B. THE FACT THAT CASILDO HERRERAS REMAINS A WORKER REPRESENTATIVE ON THE ILO GOVERNING BODY, DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE ORGANIZATION OF WHICH HE WAS SECRETARY GENERAL (THE CGT) HAS BEEN INTERVENED, UNDOUBTEDLY IS A PROBLEM FOR THE GOA. HERRERAS WAS ELECTED TO THIS POSITION BECAUSE OF THE SUPPORT HE RECEIVED FROM THE ICFTU. FROM THE GOA'S VIEWPOINT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN

PREFERABLE IF THE ICFTU HAD ASKED HERRERAS TO RESIGN FROM THIS POST AFTER THE INTERVENTION OF THE CGT, BUT UNFORTUNATELY THE ICFTU HAD NOT SEEN FIT TO TAKE THAT ACTION.

C. THE MINISTER ASKED FOR CONFIRMATION THAT AFL-CIO PRESIDENT MEANY WOULD BE A MEMBER OF THE ICFTU-FACT-FINDING MISSION EXPECTED TO ARRIVE IN ARGENTINA DURING THE LATTER HALF OF JANUARY 1977. (WE RESPONDED THAT WE HAD NO INFORMATION CONCERNING A VISIT BY MR. MEANY.) ASKED FOR HIS VIEW REGARDING VISITS TO ARGENTINA BY U. S. TRADE UNIONISTS, THE MINISTER RESPONDED THAT SUCH VISITS WERE NOT DEEMED TO BE CONVENIENT DURING THE CURRENT PERIOD IN WHICH TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN SUSPENDED. IN EFFECT, SUCH VISITS WERE INCONSISTENT AND INCONGRUENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S SUSPENSION OF UNION ACTIVITIES IN ARGENTINA. OF COURSE, ONCE THE TRADE UNION SITUATION HAS BEEN NORMALIZED, SUCH CONTACTS WILL BE WELCOMED BY THE GOVERNMENT. NEVERTHELESS, THE GOA HAS MAINTAINED AN OPEN DOOR POLICY NOT ONLY WITH FOREIGN TRADE UNIONISTS, BUT ALSO WITH OTHERS WHO HAVE WISHED TO REVIEW THE GENERAL HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN ARGENTINA AT CLOSE HAND, IN THE CONVICTION THAT SUCH OPENNESS IS THE MOST INTELLIGENT WAY OF DEALING WITH POTENTIAL CRITICISM FROM ABROAD. IN KEEPING WITH THIS POLICY, UPON BEING ASKED BY FOREIGN LABOR LEADERS FOR AUTHORIZATION TO VISIT WITH ARGENTINE UNION OFFICIALS UNDER DETENTION, LIENDO IMMEDIATELY ARRANGED FOR SUCH VISITS AT THE JAILHOUSES. THE MOST HIGH-RANKING FOREIGN LABOR OFFICIAL TO VISIT ARGENTINA THUS FAR HAS BEEN JAN KULAKOWSKI OF THE WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOR (WCL) AND, SUGGESTED LIENDO, PERHAPS THE OPEN DOOR POLICY ACCORDED KULAKOWSKI HELPED TO MODERATE THE WCL'S POSITION VIS-A-VIS ARGENTINA IN THE ILO.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BUENOS 08237 211157Z

D. HE WAS NONCOMMITTAL ON AIFLD'S PAST RECORD IN ARGENTINA, FIELDING THE QUESTION TO ONE OF HIS ASSISTANTS. (THE FOLLOWING DAY, HOWEVER, HE TOLD IRO-FIET ACTIVIST ARTEGOITIA THAT AFTER UNION ACTIVITIES ARE FULLY NORMALIZED, AND TRAINING ACTIVITY OF THIS SORT ASSISTED FROM ABROAD SHOULD BE HANDLED ON A UNION-TO-UNION BASIS WITHOUT ANY APPARENT GOVERNMENT ROLE INVOLVED.)

3. COMMENT. ALTHOUGH THE MINISTER'S COMMENTS CONCERNING HERRERAS WERE DIRECTED AGAINST THE ICFTU, IT IS WELL TO KEEP IN MIND THAT ARGENTINES, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, DO NOT DISASSOCIATE THE AFL-CIO FROM THE ICFTU. IN FACT, IN THIS PARTICULAR MATTER, LABOR SECRETARY DALL'ASTA (WHO WAS ALSO PRESENT AT THE LUNCHEON) RECENTLY MENTIONED TO EMBASSY HIS SURPRISE AT AFL-CIO'S CONTINUED CONCERN FOR, AND PROTECTION OF, HERRERAS. (BUENOS AIRES 7853).

4. WE FIND THE MINISTER'S STATEMENT DISCOURAGING VISITS BY

FOREIGN TRADE UNIONISTS TO BE DISTURBING BECAUSE, WHEN CONSIDERED IN CONJUNCTION WITH TWO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS HERE, IT MAY BE SIGNALLING A CHANGE IN THE GOA'S POSTURE CONCERNING INTERNATIONAL LABOR TIES DURING THE CURRENT "TRANSITION" PERIOD. HERETOFORE, OUR UNDERSTANDING HAS BEEN THAT THE GOA WOULD PERMIT ARGENTINE LABOR TO FULFILL ITS OBLIGATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS (SEE BUENOS AIRES 3337). TO BE SURE, THE MINISTER SUGGESTED TO EMBOFFS IN MAY (BUENOS AIRES 3061) THAT THE HOSTING OF INTERNATIONAL LABOR CONFERENCES IN ARGENTINA WAS INCONSISTENT WITH THE SUSPENSION OF LABOR ACTIVITIES, BUT SINCE THEN THE LABOR MINISTRY WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE FIELDING OF AN ARGENTINE WORKERS' DELEGATION TO THE ILO CONFERENCE IN JUNE, IT HAS NOT INTERFERED (FOR THE MOST PART) WITH THE TRAVEL ABROAD OF ARGENTINE LABOR LEADERS TO ATTEND CONFERENCES OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS WITH WHICH THEY ARE AFFILIATED, AND IT DID NOT INTERFERE WITH ONE (ALBEIT DISCREET) INTERNATIONAL LABOR CONFERENCE IN ARGENTINA (THE LATIN AMERICAN EXECUTIVE

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BUENOS 08237 211157Z

COMMITTEE OF THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF FOOD WORKERS, SEE BUENOS AIRES 6858). HOWEVER, WE ARE TROUBLED BY TWO RECENT UNION INTERVENTIONS. THE MARITIME WORKERS UNION AND FEDERATION (SOMU/FAMAR) WERE INTERVENED DECEMBER 10 AND THE CGT REGIONAL BODY OF MORON WAS NOTIFIED OF ITS INTERVENTION DECEMBER 13 (ALTHOUGH BACKDATED TO NOVEMBER 8). IN THE CASE OF SOMU/FAMAR, NO OFFICIAL REASON WAS GIVEN BUT SECRETARY GENERAL MASSAGATTI WAS TOLD IT WAS BECAUSE HE HAD SENT A CABLE TO THE ITF PROTESTING THE MANNER IN WHICH THE ARGENTINE WORKER DELEGATE TO THE ILO MARITIME CONFERENCE WAS CHOSEN. IN THE CASE OF THE CGT OF MORON, THE OFFICIAL REASON GIVEN WAS THAT THAT BODY HAD VIOLATED A STANDING STATUTE OF THE CGT THAT NO REGIONAL BODY CAN ISSUE A STATEMENT WITHOUT THE AUTHORIZATION OF THE CGT CENTRAL COMMITTEE. UNDER GOVERNMENT RULES CURRENTLY IN FORCE, IT IS THE MILITARY INTERVENTOR WHO IS SOLELY EMPOWERED TO ACT IN THE NAME OF THE CGT. THE INTERVENTOR TOLD THE MORON BODY THAT IT HAD ISSUED TWO STATEMENTS WHICH WERE DEEMED TO BE IN VIOLATION OF THIS STATUTE, THE FIRST BEING A STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THE LIGHT AND POWER WORKERS STRIKE IN SEPTEMBER OR OCTOBER AND THE SECOND BEING A CABLE WHICH THE BODY HAD SENT TO THE AFL-CIO ON THE OCCASION OF THE ELECTORAL VICTORY OF GOVERNOR CARTER. (UNFORTUNATELY, GASTRONOMIC WORKER LEADER ELORZA'S FEARS IN THIS REGARD, REPORTED IN BUENOS AIRES 7457, WERE NOT EXAGGERATED.) THE DAY BEFORE THE INTERVENTION, INCIDENTALLY, MORON CGT ASSISTANT SECRETARY HORACIO ROMAN (AN AUTO WORKER LEADER) WAS ARRESTED AT HIS HOME BY INDIVIDUALS WHO DID NOT IDENTIFY THEMSELVES, AND WHO ARE BELIEVED TO BE MILITARY, AND HIS PRESENT WHEREABOUTS ARE UNKNOWN. THE EXPLANATIONS GIVEN FOR THE INTERVENTIONS, INsofar AS THEY CONCERN COMMUNICATIONS RELATING TO QUESTIONS OF FOREIGN OR

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED MORE IN TERMS OF THE PROCEDURE INVOLVED--I.E., THE FAILURE TO OBTAIN PRIOR AUTHORIZATION FROM THE AUTHORITIES--RATHER THAN THE SUBSTANCE OF THE MESSAGES. MOREOVER, THE TWO INTERVENED ORGANIZATIONS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN OTHER ACTIVITIES, UNDOUBTEDLY DEEMED PREJUDICIAL BY THE GOVERNMENT, E.G.,
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 BUENOS 08237 211157Z

PARTICIPATING IN THE VARIOUS AD HOC UNION COMMITTEES WHICH HAVE BEEN FORMED WITH THE AIM OF PUTTING PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT TO ACCELERATE THE PROCESS OF TRADE UNION NORMALIZATION. HOWEVER, OTHER MEMBERS OF SUCH COMMITTEES HAVE NOT BEEN INTERVENED--AT LEAST NOT YET. MINISTER LIENDO TOLD IRO-FIET ACTIVIST ARTEGOITIA THAT THE INTERVENTION OF THE SOMU WAS RELATED TO MASSAGGATTI'S "IMPRUDENT MESSAGE" CONCERNING THE ARGENTINE DELEGATION TO THE ILO MARITIME CONFERENCE AND, LIENDO FURTHER ALLEGED, THE INTERVENTION WAS CONSUMMATED (PRESUMABLY THE THE NAVY) BEFORE HE GOT WIND OF IT, AND COULD HAVE A CHANCE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. WE SHALL BE EXPLORING FURTHER WHETHER THE PARAMETERS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARD INTERNATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS ARE INDEED CHANGING. END COMMENT.
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